

'Downpressor man': securitisation, safeguarding and social work

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“Downpressor Man”: Securitisation, Safeguarding and Social Work

Abstract: (150)

The Counter Terrorism and Security Act came into force in July 2015 in the UK. This places a statutory duty on many frontline organisations, i.e schools, social services, and prisons for example, to work within the PREVENT agenda, a policy arising from Britain’s overall counter-terrorism policy, CONTEST. We argue that PREVENT is representative of increasing securitised social policies, that serve to firstly, view people within particular individualised neo-liberal discourses and thin narratives, and, secondly, serves to coerce the profession of social work into hitherto unknown areas, namely, national security and counter-terrorism. We note the unapologetic linkage of traditional forms of what we term here, “welfare safeguarding” customarily the domain of social work, with what we term “security safeguarding”. If the profession of social work in the UK, and we suspect other Western regimes, wishes to avoid becoming a profession of “downpressor men”, the uncritical incursion into issues of national security and counter-terrorism must be highlighted.

Keywords:

PREVENT, Social Work, Securitisation, Safeguarding, Neo-Liberalism, Counter-Terrorism.

Introduction:

We begin with a musical reference, an unusual academic practice perhaps, but a helpful starting point in our thinking to try and “capture” a mood or a sentiment, within which our subsequent analysis emerges. “Downpressor Man”, written by Peter Tosh of Bob Marley and the Wailers, depicts elites who oppress and exploit people, but who will one day suffer for their actions (Masouri, 2013). To refer to someone as a “downpressor man”, is to remind them of their connection to the world, and the suffering they will inevitably endure because of their actions, and, as the lyrics repeatedly ask “where you gonna run to?” (Tulloch, 2013).

The theme of elitist oppression is pertinent to this discussion, given current policy directives in the UK, and developing elsewhere in Western liberal regimes, that require social workers to engage in increasingly oppressive tasks, that run counter to social work values. In particular, this paper documents the relatively recent incursion by the social work profession, into areas of national security, namely becoming inextricably linked to, and part of, counter-terrorism measures. We are therefore suggesting that social work practice needs a warning to avoid becoming a profession of “downpressor men” in its uncritical adoption of counter-terrorism strategies. We aim to remind all social workers of their connection to the world, and the connection to the profession’s social justice and emancipatory values. The paper has three overarching aims, which, set in a wider exploration of securitisation theory, are to:

- 1) Explore the context within which social work practice in the UK, has been co-opted into undertaking work associated with counter-terrorism, documenting the ways and forms in which such securitised practices have emerged and been enacted.
- 2) To critically consider how far the term “safeguarding” has used by the government to legitimise this incursion of social work into counter-terrorism work.
- 3) To critically explore how increasing securitisation, impacts directly, and decisively on social work policy and practice

We aim therefore, to challenge dominant, and on the surface, “common sense” (McKendrick and Finch, 2016b) and persuasive narrative that currently abounds in the UK, that young people at risk of extremism and radicalisation simply require “safeguarding” using the state’s existing systems and conceptualisations of welfare child protection. We argue that this new emerging area, cannot be conceptualised as a simple, and therefore unproblematic matter of welfare safeguarding, rather, that such surreptitious and creeping securitisation practices, if not critically examined and subject to rigorous challenge within the profession, will reposition social work into neo-liberal, coercive and reductive roles. This will serve to undermine professional ethics, will destroy fundamental tenets of social work values, as well as social justice concerns, and will lead to a profession that supports, rather than challenges the continued marginalisation, exclusion and punishment of those most at risk from neo liberal and neo conservative policies. The article begins with a brief overview of the policy context that legally mandated social workers to work within the UKs government counter-terrorism

strategy, known as PREVENT before exploring the concept of securitisation, which is a central tenet of this paper.

Policy Context:

In July 2015, The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) came into force in the UK. This requires a number of specified agencies, including schools, colleges, prisons, local authorities, (including social workers) and higher education establishments to actively promote “British values”. It also places a duty (i.e. a legal requirement) on such professionals to work within the PREVENT agenda; namely to report those at risk of extremism and terrorism to the authorities. PREVENT arises from CONTEST, the governments long standing counter terrorism and national security policy. PREVENT duties requires specified front line professionals to, firstly identify those at risk of radicalisation and extremism and secondly, prevent people being drawn into terrorism. The Governments defines extremism as:

“vocal or active oppositions to fundamental British Values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faith and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism, calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.” (HM Gov, 2014).

Radicalisation is defined by the Government as the:

“process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism, committing terrorist acts either abroad or on home ground” (HM Govt, 2014)

Using the states existing collaborative arrangements between health, social care, youth offending and the police, locally led PREVENT panels aim to:

- identify individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorism
- assess the nature and extent of that risk
- develop the most appropriate support plan for the individuals concerned

- To “safeguard” children and adults being drawn into terrorism by intervening early before illegality occurs.

(HM Government, 2012)

As it can be seen, the implications for social work policy and practice are stark; practice must centre around the statutory duty to work within the PREVENT agenda (as well as promote British Values), and, as a natural consequence, to report or manage concerns if someone is at risk of, or is becoming radicalised to commit terrorism (or travel to war zones) by so called “online groomers”, acquaintances or family. Social workers are compelled to work with security services to manage that risk.

We note long standing criticisms of PREVENT by writers from a range of disciplines for example, Awan (2012) argues that the policy serves only to increase mistrust and suspicion on the already discriminated against Muslim community, and Kundani (2014) argues it legitimises the targeting and surveillance on Muslim communities. Thomas (2010) goes further, arguing that the policy justifies state surveillance and information gathering from those expressing anti western views. McCulloch and Pickering (2014) suggest that the policy introduces concerning notions of pre-crime, which serve to undermine fundamental tenants of justice. The methods of intervention, i.e deradicalisation programmes, are also criticised. Coppock and McGovern (2014) for example argue that such interventions are based on individualistic psychological models, that do not take adequate account of the wider economic and social context. Sabir (2017) argues that PREVENT itself is a form of counter insurgency “a military doctrine used against non-state actors that encourages, amongst other things, the blanket surveillance of populations and the targeting of propaganda at them” (2017:202). Writing from a social work perspective, Stanley and Guru, (2015) note a concern about social workers becoming embroiled in moral panics.

As noted previously (McKendrick and Finch, 2016a), we are concerned about “rhetorical discursive turns”, which link “safeguarding” to terrorism and indeed, such counter-terrorist practices are presented as being part and parcel of everyday welfare safeguarding practices. As we go on to explore next, such a move is a logical consequence of increasing securitisation policies and practices.

Securitisation Theory:

Buzan, Waever and De Wilde (1998), collectively known as the Copenhagen School, argue that securitisation can be defined as “a referent object [that] depicts an existential threat and justifies to the audience the use of extraordinary measures” (1998:21). They deploy a constructivist approach to the concept of securitisation. For the authors, securitisation is a predominant feature of contemporary society, and is seen as a complex and evolving set of relationships that impact directly on, and are impacted by, the global social, economic and political environment. The authors set out an argument that suggests a burgeoning and developing security complex, where discourses of risk, threat and danger are amplified and brought to greater public prominence. This is more sinister than deviancy amplification (Wilkins, 1967) however, as it is far more than media responses to moral panics, rather, it represents a state sanctioned ideology that ultimately aims at curtailing freedom and civil liberties.

The growth in securitisation narratives rely on an increase in threats to the societies that we live and work in. Buzan and Waever (2003) describe three potential threats;

- Migration where the indigenous population will be over run by influxes of other nationals thereby fundamentally changing the nature of the environment that the indigenous population are familiar with.
- Horizontal Competition – The possibility of neighbouring cultures exerting increasing cultural and linguistic influences on their neighbours leading to a sense of the “host” culture becoming eroded.
- Vertical Competition – People’s identities going through a process of unwanted change due to the influence of a neighbouring culture forcing an integration of cultural identities.

(2003: 121)

These “existential threats” to societal security allow the political classes to operate outside normal restraints and boundaries of their democratic settlement with the citizens and to

introduce a series of extraordinary measures to guard against, for example the threat of terrorism thereby legitimising such securitised practices. For example, in a Radio interview on BBC Radio 4 in June 2015 the then UK Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, identified the threat from terrorists organisations as an “existential threat” and described the need for a “full spectrum response” to what he described in binary terminology as “a battle of our values and our narrative against their narrative” (BBC, 2015). Indeed, we return to the issue of binary narratives towards the end of this paper.

Cameron’s remarks came in the aftermath of an attack on holiday makers on a beach in Tunisia in 2015, where a gunman with links to terrorist groups in the Middle East shot and killed thirty eight holiday makers (Elgot, 2015). This attack caused understandable global revulsion and anger, but it felt to us at the time, and now, that politicians from a range of countries, were quick to exploit this tragedy, by seeking to ensure that actions were taken to increase the safety and security of their countries with an increase in terror / threat levels and an rise in visible signs of security such as armed guards at airports and on public transport. As Massumi (2015) describes, in the post September 11 environment America (and most of the rest of the world) became highly attuned to the threat of terror and terrorist attacks; a new form of warfare had arrived, its ubiquitous nature and omniscient threat meant that we all were potential targets required to co-opt this new potential for threat into our daily lives and our interactions. (McKendrick and Finch 2016a).

The concept of securitisation is further developed by Giroux who, arguing from an American perspective, describes how the states response to terrorism has been characterised by an increasingly restrictive set of laws and practices which emulates the barbarity of those who are seen as responsible for the initial attacks, Giroux (2013) argues that this response can be seen in the socio spatial formations of American society. For example, Giroux describes a “pedagogy of brutalizing hardness and dehumanization: (2013:page unknown) that abound in organisations like prisons, but also in terms of building design, that aim to either contain, or keep out problem populations.

British Values and Securitisation

We now return to the notion of British values discussed in the first section of this paper. In developing a new concept of what values are central to British life, and enshrining this within counter terrorism policies and indeed, ensuring front line services have accompanying duties to promote British values, the government have been engaged in what the Copenhagen school describe as societal security as “being about collectives and their identity”. Indeed “values” are a common refrain from neo conservatives, including, but limited to, the value of traditional (married and heterosexual) families and the value of the culture of hard work (striving) which all describe an environment where the state values those who are able to exert their independence, their capacity for productive work and their ability to build a life without recourse to the state. Thus the amorphous concept of British Values become a test bed which is to be robustly protected, as they form the central tenets of British social, personal and political identity. In doing so, the government thus is playing to what the Copenhagen school describe as the promulgation of identity security.

By constructing a deliberate image of society, the former Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron, using the vehicle of “British Values” sets up a series of “straw men” who can attack that society (Islamic extremists, Trojan horse scandal in schools in Birmingham), by claiming the image as central to the security of the state and the safety of the individuals, even if the threat itself is merely felt, as opposed to actually experienced (Massumi 2015). A securitising narrative thus becomes embedded in the wider political environment meaning that we become ever more conscious of the threat to our values and our way of life, as such attitudes are consistently reinforced by powerful neoliberal actors intended to amplify the need to be constantly vigilant about own safety and security. In this febrile and anxious space, anyone who threatens that security, either directly or indirectly, is perceived as an existential threat and can be dealt with using powers that are reserved for the protection of the state itself.

Here we argue that the Copenhagen school process and model of securitisation is a necessary mechanism of neo liberal ideology that places financial gain and the societal power associated with it as a primary accoutrement of a hegemonic society where power is concentrated in the hands of the few. By constructing “safe” societal norms and values, and emphasising unsafe behaviours which are entangled with risk and threat to security, the state is now able to unproblematically deploy social workers in a reductionist role that is focussed on managing

risk and threat as opposed to exploring the societal conditions and structures that contribute to, and in some cases, cause the very risk and threat they are investigating (Webb, 2007).

Violence from Above

Securitisation has therefore become a modern political discourse, one that is essential to the furtherance of the globalised neo liberal agenda. Wacquant (2008) describes this as a form of “violence from above” (2008:24) where structural violence is unleashed on a poor, marginalised and vulnerable community, where, those with what Bordieu (1979) describes as “cultural capital” have significant reserves available to supplant the economic, moral and social order in their favour. Or, as Polanyi would have it, neo-liberalism confers significant advantages on those “whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing” (Polanyi cited in Harvey 2005 p.38)

Wacquant (2008) identifies three specific components of this violence;

- Mass Unemployment and Labour precariousness
- Relegation to decaying neighbourhoods
- Heightened stigmatization in daily life and in public discourse

Located in these three components is the opportunity to securitise those caught in this environment and to cast them as existential threats. Wacquant (2008) draws a line from structural violence from above to the requirement in neo liberal states for citizens to be economically active and contributing to the financial security of the state. Failure to do this for any reason represents an existential threat rendering those who are seen to be economically inactive as worthy of a securitised approach allowing government to respond with the use of extraordinary measures in response to this.

In relation to social work policy and practice, we are therefore making the argument, that securitising practices have now decisively entered social work, most starkly in terms of the PREVENT agenda but also in policies like the Troubled Families Scheme (McKendrick and Finch, 2016a) which target so called deviant or problem families. What we see therefore currently, is the result of securitisation creep, in terms of securitising practices and policies

entering and gaining “common sense” traction in social and public policy, as well as in public and political discourses that provide thin explanatory narratives (Tyler, 2013).

Social Work and Safeguarding

As discussed at the outset of this article, social work in the UK has become legally mandated to “safeguard” those at alleged risk of radicalisation and extremism, either by safeguarding children from being drawn into extremism from third parties, or indeed their own families; or removing children from so called “extremist” families, or identifying adults who might also be at risk from being drawn into extremism, or have been drawn into terrorism. Our focus in this paper is on the children and families context but we note the worrying trend of narratives around vulnerable adults also being drawn into extremism and terrorism, i.e. those with learning difficulties or mental ill health (Royal College of Psychiatry, date unknown).

Social Work as defined by the International Federation of Social Workers is as follows;

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.”

Should Social Work wish to adhere to, and indeed develop upon this definition, we suggest a need to be vigilant to the increasingly securitised social environment, which will inevitably result in social workers themselves becoming increasingly required to assume the role of state actors in identifying and engaging with individuals and groups that are perceived as an existential threat. Policies such as PREVENT emphasise not only the role of Social Work but also the role played by multi agency approaches in the diminution of risk and threat via a more securitised route. Here we see the inherent values of the social work profession becoming threatened by a global neo liberal ideology that as Harvey (2005) notes “has meant in short, the financialisation of everything” (p.33.)

The crucial question therefore arises as to how far the usage of the term “safeguarding” within the PREVENT agenda is different, if at all, from the more traditional sense of what we call here “welfare safeguarding”. We note some distinct differences that we wish to explore here. It is important to note that this is much more than a semantic debate, but is based on a very real concern that the term “safeguarding”, which appears on the surface to be benign and one of obvious common sense, has been co-opted to legitimise ethically dubious securitised practices amongst caring professions. Further, that such a rhetorical co-opting of safeguarding, makes any subsequent criticism of such securitised policies challenging.

In what we term “traditional” arenas of the welfare safeguarding of children and young people, practice is usually aimed at safeguarding children from abuse, which whilst not totally neutral, ie notions of abuse are still socially constructed and as such, rather shifting concepts, are generally divorced from political ideology, although not political expediency. Thus, children and young people, are generally viewed as victims, recognising the Rotherham case in the UK – where reports of sexual exploitation were not acted upon as the girls were considered complicit in their abuse (Leigh and Crossley 2015). In this traditional view however, the focus on welfare is viewed as a good in its own right.

Further, in traditional welfare safeguarding arenas, concerns about the risk of possible crime in the future are not a typical feature or consideration of practice. The victims of abuse are thus not deemed as potential threats to the very fabric of society, or indeed capable of terrorism. Those involved in alleged extremism or being at risk of being radicalised are clearly not viewed within a victims discourse rather, as “potential criminals” and a very real threat to the public.

Yet we continue to see those links perpetuated, for example, in the government produced signs and symptoms list approach to identifying those at risk of becoming radicalised, in the very explicit linking of the similar processes of online grooming found in children sexual exploitation, with online radicalisation of so called vulnerable children and young people. We argue that these continued linkages serves to legitimise practice in this area, by making it a simple and hence unproblematic matter of safeguarding – yet it is clear, the processes are very different, with referral (albeit it voluntarily) to multi agency CHANNEL panels. Thus we see this not as traditional welfare safeguarding, but more along the lines of what we term “securitised safeguarding”.

We would also suggest that the “harm” caused by the PREVENT policy, for example, the continued demonisation of already discriminated communities, can be significant. Indeed the report “Eroding Trust: The UK’s Prevent Counter-Extremism Strategy in Health and Education” clearly highlighted case studies where harm has been caused. Some of these harms include for example the case of a school dinner lady who was referred under PREVENT for identifying anomalies in the preparation of Halal food and a nine year old being targeted for making a joke.

Further questions about how far safeguarding in the counter-terrorism domain is exactly the same as, or indeed, different from traditional safeguarding arenas, also concerns how far current types of abuse “fit” with this work and what is the evidence base? We suggest there is a worryingly practice and research vacuum in this field, where evidence in other areas is being applied indiscriminately to this work. For example, a recent publicised case in the Family Courts in England, highlighted a case of a 16 year old girl who was made a ward of court¹ because of “emotional harm” she experienced by living with parents who were described as Isis supporters. This received public attention because (unusually) the social worker was praised in this case. This contrasts with a case of a pre birth care order being sought on a white family with links to a far right group, where as the Judge ruled, it was felt that parents political ideologies on their own do not constitute to significant harm. We are not suggesting of course, that these two cases are directly comparable or that the wrong decision was made in the case, our point here is about the definition of emotional harm being extended to include the impact of parents’ political views in one case.

It could be argued of course, the social work has always been agents of the state, and has long been involved in managing “threats” to society, by either providing a buffer to the worst effects of capitalism (Mullaly, 2006), or indeed, removing children disproportionately from poor or black and minority ethnic families (Harris, 2014). To counter this claim, we would argue that the “feel” of the policy is very different from anything the profession has been co-opted into previously and the move from welfare (however socially constructed and politically

¹ This means the High Court is given supreme legal guardianship of a child to ensure their safety and protection. Day to day care remains with an individual or the local authority but a court’s consent is required for any important step in the child’s life. (Johns, 2017)

loaded that term is) targeting and identifying potential future crime, is a new low for the profession. We also note the re-emergence of “non- violent extremism”.

The Impact on Social Work Policy and Practice

We are making the argument therefore, that in an environment of heightened anxiety and “existential threat” (and, indeed, as citizens we share those anxieties, not least as residents of two cities in the UK, London and Glasgow, that have been subject to terrorist attack), a worrying direction is emerging, driven by neo conservative ideology of right wing Governments in Britain and abroad. Against the back drop of increased awareness and concerns over the potential for indiscriminate attacks, our concern is that a unique opportunity has arisen to reposition the state and as an inevitable consequence, to recast the role of social work within it. This is uniquely evidenced in a comment by David Cameron

“Frankly, we need a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and much more active, muscular liberalism. For too long, we have been a passively tolerant society, saying to our citizens: as long as you obey the law we will leave you alone.”

(Gov.Uk, 2011)

In developing a line of argument that places the state on a hostile footing, that sees passivity and tolerance as harbingers of threat, we argue that there is a redrawing of the boundaries of the state’s relationship with its population, cynically using the threat of terrorism as traction. In essence the line between the state and the population is no longer fixed. The line becomes blurred to be applied discretionarily by the state, creating a shift in the balance of power between the state and the individual dramatically in favour of the state. The “active, muscular liberalism” described, can be found in policies like PREVENT and Troubled Families where local authorities are incentivised via payment or indeed, by surveillance concerns in terms of PREVENT, to bring increasing numbers of “extremists” or “troubled families” into the net of public services. Indeed, they may then be compelled to engage in activities with professionals, where their deviance will be reduced via a contemporary version of what

Donzelot (1977), in “Policing the Family” described as the “tutelary complex.” (p.96). Indeed, we see evidence of a growing tutelary complex in operation here and so it is worth exploring this notion further.

Using the French juvenile court as an example Donzelot(1977) explores the way in which young people who became involved with the courts engaged with the services of the professionals who work there, he describes it thus;

“Set within a double network of social guardians and technicians, the family appear as though colonized. There are no longer two authorities facing one another: the family and the apparatus, but a series of concentric circles around the child: the family circle, the circle of technicians, and the circle of social guardians” (1977:103)

We suggest therefore that policies such as PREVENT and troubled families replicate the powerful “concentric circle” metaphor; namely, local authority social workers, health visitors, teachers, and the police form a concentric circle around the family working together to change the behaviour of the young person, and indeed, if these efforts are unsuccessful, the young person may find themselves involved in the Criminal Justice counter extremism complex where they would be exposed to the courts and potentially prison. Donzelot (1977) recognised the potential for this to occur and suggests that the tutelary complex, far from being a preventative, benign intervention, may serve instead to accelerate the young person toward the juridical environment.

As well as redrawing the balance of power between the state and the populace, such securitising policies, may serve to redesign the parameters of the state using a language of encouragement that places these values in a benevolent light. A new “muscular liberalism” defined and embodied in the tutelary complex, aims to identify families or individuals who present a threat and engage them in a series of interventions that are encapsulated in the notion of “early intervention.” Therefore, by co-opting familiar terminology, language, practices and processes, which are seen as commensurate with traditional social work values and using it to advance a neo liberal agenda is a familiar governmental approach (Garret 2016). Indeed, Harvey (2005) argues that use of benevolent liberal language in policy areas that are not about benevolence, can have a more sinister aspect. Harvey states:

“such visions, or templates for change have to appeal to professional institutions and instincts and to our values and desires. Moreover if successful this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense so as to be taken for granted and not open to question” (2005:5)

In terms of the so called benevolence of “early intervention” for example, this is further advanced by McKendrick (2017) who argues against the common sense view of the desirability of the named person scheme in Scotland. Featherstone White and Morris (2014) also argue that early intervention can accelerate children and young people further and more quickly into a complex professional environment, one that quickly shifts from a narrative of “support” with its benevolent overtures to one of “protection” that has much greater and potentially deleterious consequences. They provide a compelling argument for a settlement between the state and its citizens that fully acknowledges the impact of disadvantage and discrimination, understands this and the emergence of threat and risk within families.

McKendrick (2016), Featherstone et al (2014) and Garrett (2016) all argue that the thin political discourse that sees individual responsibility as the sole reason for the involvement of the state in family life is a central tenant of the neo liberal ideology. In locating threat and failure in families, a repositioned state emerges which melds services to the individual and as Fergusson (2007) has argued, shifts responsibility onto the individual freeing the state of the burden of the needy and the dependent. A new repositioned state emerges one that sees those who require support as potential threats to be exposed to more rigorous surveillance and an increased level of suspicion.

Of course, contemporary social work in many countries and contexts, promotes the importance of multi agency working (and indeed where children die at the hands of their carers, poor multi agency working practices are often cited as a cause) however, as Donzelot (1977) points out the “obliteration of the separation between the assistencial and the penal” (p.109) presents a problem for the traditional social work ethics, values and practice. The coming together of agencies to provide services in a more “joined up” has been a feature of neo liberalism. Services are often provided from the same building with the distinct professional characteristics of individuals obscured by agile working practices and a gradual

erosion of professional differentiation. Jeyasingham (2014) for example, in his ethnographic study of social workers working in agile ways, compared to more traditional social work environments, points to the loss of space created by agile working and the impact this has on a social workers ability to develop a more analytical and considered set of conclusions in their consideration of case work issues. Kundani (2015) in exploring the development of the PREVENT agenda with its inbuilt notions of early identification and multi agency working highlights, an inherent tension in police, educators and social workers working together in such sensitive environment. Kundani argues:

“by recruiting non policing professionals to engage in what is, in effect, a counterterrorism intelligence gathering role, their own professional norms of trust and confidentiality are undermined. There is an obvious tension between policing....and those of education” p.182

The involvement of the police in closer working relationships is equally problematic as Donzelot (1977) argues that it serves instead to;

“places the latter (young people) in the gear train of the judicial apparatus and creates the possibility of a capitalization of surveillance which over exposes the minors to penal identification” (p.110)

Kundani (2015) develops this further in problematizing the PREVENT agenda. He argues that for Muslim communities PREVENT has meant an increased exposure to Donzelot’s (1977) notion of the capitalization of surveillance where PREVENT police officers and members of the security services are seen as engaged in the practice of entryism of Muslim communities. Indeed, Kundani (2015) expressed concern that the CHANNEL project, serves not as a benevolent welfarist institution, but as a “cheap way of gaining detailed information about individuals not considered a national security risk but who may associate with those who are” (p.181). Indeed, as we argued earlier, this is increasingly being operated within unproblematic discourses and benevolent notions of “safeguarding”, alongside unchallenged notions of “vulnerability”. Again, we see here evidence of further discursive rhetorical shifts, and the adoption of traditional welfarist language to justify state intrusion.

Bringing together a wide variety of agencies to work to reduce the likelihood of further involvement with services has historically be seen as a valuable and sensible approach and

there are many compelling arguments to support these arrangements, but where caution is required, is when these arrangements are recast to support a newly emerging securitising agenda and where the best intentions of professional staff are counterposed with a government led desire to ensure greater surveillance of particular populations and a voracious desire to identify and engage individuals in a repressive securitised tutelary complex.

The implications for social work as well as other caring professions, in terms of growing securitisation in the UK are thus stark. If we allow welfarist language to be co-opted and used to justify growing state incursion into peoples lives, then all our professions emancipatory and “caring” values will be seriously curtailed. We note how difficult it has been to challenge the view that counter terrorism work, is “just safeguarding” like any other safeguarding practice in any other domain.

Reflective Commentary

In our dissemination activities, namely presentations, or training events, in our albeit, limited work to date in the area of PREVENT and social work, we have noted our strong need to position ourselves, and emphasise our moral indignation about recent global terrorist atrocities. As residents of London and Glasgow, cities that have been subject to terrorist attacks, we are acutely aware of our desire to be safe from harm. We also feel a need to position ourselves ideologically and feel a need to reassure people that whilst we are critical of PREVENT, this does not imply we are promoting terrorism or extremism. This begs a question as to why we felt the need to do this? One reason is perhaps that we are aware of the binary nature of this issue as noted at the outset of this paper, namely you are either with PREVENT or you are preventing PREVENT. And if you prevent PREVENT, you must be promoting the terrorist cause. We would wish to take a more thoughtful, less binary, standpoint, to critically consider, how can social workers work least oppressively, remain critical and promote social justice within statutory requirements? This of course, is not a new question for social work by any means.

We have also noted how the fears and sensitivities around this topic, promotes silence and a shutting down of the debate. Indeed one of us was prevented from talking about PREVENT

at a university (not our own we are pleased to say) on the dubious grounds of health and safety concerns. We acknowledge the sensitivities, the unconscious fears and anxieties the topic raises in the audiences we speak to, namely fear of death from terrorism, the fear of living in an uncertain and “less safe” world, unconscious fears of accusations of racism and Islamophobia, and how to manage personal values with professional ones. It also needs to be acknowledged that we also share these fears and uncertainties. It can be argued that the profession of social work (and other “caring” professions) has always struggled to know how to position itself in relation to the state. What is clear however, is that there is a dangerous practice and research vacuum.

Conclusion

We began the paper with a reggae musical reference, and suggested there was a danger of social workers becoming “downpressor men” in that far from being a profession that aims to emancipate and work alongside people to promote social justice, rather it has become a professional of elites. As such, there is a danger that the professional of social work, has forgotten about its link to society and its role in the promotion of a better, fairer more equal society. For Peter Tosh, there would be a day of reckoning, where there would be nowhere to hide or run to. We feel that this is a decisive moment in the history of social work in the UK at least, and a very real concern that notions of welfare safeguarding are being superseded by a malign securitised form of safeguarding.

An increased focus on global security is not therefore, we argue, something that we should accept uncritically. In exploring the rhetoric associated with it and used by the state, we see a deliberate and cynical attempt to reposition social work and social workers in the UK in an increasingly retroactive and restrictive place, a place where fundamental ethical and moral tenants of Social Work’s unique identity run the risk of being systematically stripped away from our understanding of the role and task of social workers. It is of significant concern that the government has elicited support in this venture, namely counter –terrorism work, from those who would otherwise purport to be active supporters of social work practice.

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